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A SERMON

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ON

THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

WALTER TEMPLE JONES,

BY

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PSALM ~~XXVI~~, 10TH VERSE:—"Be still and know that I am God."

There are seasons in life when the heart is hushed into silence and a solemn awe fills the soul. Such a time is when the God of glory thundereth;—in the majesty of the storm—in the sobbing mystery of the sea and the wind—in the solemnity of night. Such a time is when God's judgments are abroad in the world—when war desolates and devastates—when pestilence rages and ruin stalks in riot over the land. To such a time does the Psalmist refer when he shews the fearful destruction of those who oppose the progress and peaceful triumph of the Church, likened here to a placid and beneficent river, bearing beauty and blessing to the world. Of those who would stay its tide, or restrain or thwart its heavenly mission, he says, "Come behold the works of the Lord, what desolations He hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the fire." He is stronger than the strongest opposition. He is mightier than the mightiest foe. The manifestation of such power astounds and awakens profound awe. Such is its effect and result and design. "Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."

Evidently the display of the divine sovereignty and majesty is designed and leads to the contemplation of God, and to feelings of solemnity and hushed reverence.

Surely such a time is when we stand in the presence of the early dead. There is no monarch that exacts such universal homage as Death. And no messenger of the King of kings is there before whose presence we so stand with heads uncovered and with hearts attent. When he plants his pale banner in the field we halt in wonder and silence! We muse and are still! Insensibly a feeling of solemnity, not allied to fear so much as to awe, possesses the soul. How powerless

to resist this summons when God calls by His servant Death, let this sad spectacle teach us! How helpless in the grasp of fierce disease, notwithstanding all the barriers love or youth, health or hope, skill or care may interpose, we have another mournful testimony—in this impressive scene.

We have come so often, my friends, these last few weeks and months to this house of prayer—made sacred and sombre to us as a house of mourning—we *must* pause in life's busy task and ponder! We must hear when God speaks thus to us. Oh let us bring our crushed and bleeding hearts to this sanctuary and find comfort in the brave words of this ringing song of triumph and hope; and learn the lesson taught us here and impressed upon us by His Providence—of unmurmuring submission to the ordering of our overruling Sovereign, who says: "Be still and know that I am God."

I wish therefore to speak of the duty of submission to the divine will. And I wish first to note wherein it consists.

It is hardly necessary to remark that it does not consist in stoical indifference or stolid insensibility. God gives us hearts that can feel as he gives us eyes that can see. A heart without feeling is as unnatural, as abnormal as an eye without sight. It is duty to feel,—to cultivate, and properly to guide and restrain the sensibilities. We can never conceive of hardness as pleasing to Him who is represented to us as full of tender mercies, and exceeding pitiful. Tears are no sin. Let us thank God for these safety valves of human emotion and overwhelming sorrow. "Tears fertilize the world." They make all sweet and precious things possible, and bring them to their highest perfection. Jesus wept. He groaned in spirit and was troubled. Oh no, it is not wrong to weep our loss, and in tears to supplicate a loving Father for support under His rod.

The text aptly and beautifully expresses this divine submission under the idea of stillness, silence, quiescence, rest. Be still. How expressive! A hushed, patient quietude.

Do you remember that scene so briefly yet vividly portrayed, when the venerable priest of God saw his sacrilegious

sons smitten by divine wrath? Aaron, with his white beard and holy mitre, never seems so exalted and grand, so much like a true servant of God, as when it was written of him, in so fearful a calamity, "And Aaron held his peace."

So, too, David, in great sorrow, in severe trial, utters in like manner his acquiescence. "I was dumb. I opened not my mouth, because *Thou* didst it."

So, too, Job, the pattern of patient suffering, smitten with disaster and overwhelming catastrophe, we are told, "in all this sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

This stillness—this acquiescence in the divine will—this christian submission—is due in part unto, and means a consonance with, God's will. Borne on the current of His government without resistance, there is accord, and hence no collision nor jar. We are at rest with respect to God when our desires correspond with His, just as the objects upon the surface of the earth are at rest, with respect to the earth itself, when they move with it. The trees are still, and the moveless mountains, though borne by the flying earth in its orbit with incredible velocity.

Yet surely this is not all. This submission means more than mere silence. It means restfulness and trust. The tired and sobbing child, borne by the loving arms of its mother, is not merely silent but content, and feels a great peace, a sweet serenity in the midst of darkness and alarms.

Divine submission is also cheerful and unselfish. It must be cheerful in opposition to what is forced or constrained. Not because it is vain and useless to contend with what God does, but because it is unreasonable and wrong. Not because we cannot help ourselves, but because what God does is right. It must be unselfish in that it regards God and not self. We are to submit and be still in severe dispensations of divine providence, not because we bargain with God for spiritual blessing thereby. We do not consent to be resigned that we may gain good, but because God is right and wise and tender and good; because He is sovereign, and we are His creatures and subjects, we submit unquestioningly.

Having thus seen wherein it consists, let me briefly point to reasons for its cultivation and enforcement.

1. God is just. He can do no wrong. However strange and severe any affliction may seem to us, we can never charge God foolishly. It is an unquestionable truth, that, however He may contradict our wishes, He will never trespass upon our rights. The rights of His creatures are as sacred to Him as His own. He may deprive of earthly comforts and earthly friends, of health, of children, of life—still He takes but what He gave. These are lent favors which, at His will, He can and may recall.

This fact should develop a spirit resigned and meek. What we have is God's. He has a right to His own.

2. But when we remember that God is also wise and good, that it is not possible for Him to err, and that His tender mercies are over all His works, we have additional reason for complete acquiescence. We could not be in better hands, nor in gentler care. We could not be guided more unerringly. If then we murmur and say "where is the wisdom and goodness of such afflictions as this?" let us remember we may not always know the purpose God has in view. We see His footsteps, not his plans—the execution, not the ordering. But we may know, from the infinitude of His perfections, that what He has done is for its purpose wisest and best. Else we would have the infinitely wise God acting less wisely than He might have done! No, "what we know not now we shall know hereafter." But this much we know now, "He doeth all things well."

3. But from the teachings of God's word we know that the design of all affliction to God's children is merciful, and the effect salutary. He afflicts not willingly, but that we may be partakers of His holiness. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness in them that are exercised thereby." God's purpose to His children in all bereavement and sorrow is a purpose of blessing—of mercy. As the night and the storm are needful; as the win-

ter's cold and snow bring benefit to soil, so trial and grief are God's messengers bearing blessing to the soul.

4. Once more I remark that resignation brings to the stricken heart immediate and effectual consolation and support. True submission secures the rich blessings designed in every sorrow, while a rebellious and resisting spirit smarts and chafes and shuts out the only solace that can be afforded at such a time. It is only to those that are "*exercised* thereby" that chastening "worketh out the peaceable fruits of righteousness." "God is our refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble."

When we are satisfied that the Lord has done right, and feel willing that he should dispose of us, and everything dear to us, as it seemeth good in His sight, we have reached a point where no earthly affliction can overwhelm us. We are come too near to God Himself, the ocean of felicity, to feel very sensibly the loss of any earthly good. Oh, my weeping and mourning friends, if you can take sanctuary here at the footstool of a righteous and sovereign God, your sorrow can be lighted from the very throne itself. This God is your Father—the God of all comfort, and His comforts are like Himself, great and wonderful. He can astonish us as much by the tranquility he spreads over our minds in days of calamity and rebuke, as by the sudden and dreadful changes which take place in the course of His providence. He can comfort us "in all time of our tribulation."

I have felt that I should speak thus, dear friends, to encourage in you the spirit of meek submission. It is the part of wisdom and of grace to be still and recognize that we are in the hands of God, a sovereign too wise to err, too kind to bring unneeded sorrow. May it be given you to say truly, simply and humbly, "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

Oh, friends, how sad, how strange to see him thus! Not yet reaching man's estate, in the glow of youth and health, with hopes unfulfilled, and "noble promise of nobler fruitage,"

> "Death lies on him like an untimely frost
> Upon the fairest flower of all the field."

How sad, how strange. Yet who can say that that brief life was spent in vain, or that God's time is not best.

If to have been loved wherever he had lived, wherever he was known; to be courteous in demeanor, honorable in act, gentle in speech, pure in thought; if to be cherished by his fellows as worthy of their esteem and affection; if to be honored by his teachers and superiors as entitled to their confidence and trust; if to be obedient and respectful at home, considerate and tender *to the very last*,—a comfort and a joy to his parents, and an example to younger ones in the household; if this be a noble and useful life, he has not lived in vain. Nay more, as there are rich and fragrant memories to cherish, may there not be likewise sweet and precious hopes? Given to Christ in infancy, trained and taught in the house of God, thoughtful and conscientious in the discharge of duties, and often deeply impressed with divine things, and meditating the profession of personal faith in Christ, is there not hope that,

"Wearing the white flower of a blameless life"

here, he wears the amaranthine crown in the better world?

Surely those who knew him best so judge.

But may I not, should I not speak in solemn admonition to all who hear me this day? Oh, dear friends, you his comrades, and associates, and acquaintances, hear—heed God's solemn voice, "Be ye also ready." It seems but yesterday since he sat in these seats with as fair promise of life, usefulness and honor as any! See here that youth furnishes no immunity. Health keeps not back disease and death. Pleasant manners, attractive traits, a sweet and lovely character—these ward not off the arrows of this king. "Death loves a shining mark." Promise of talent and usefulness is no shield. The oldest son, the most needful—human nature would judge, the support and stay, tall, comely, graceful, the father's pride, the mother's joy—is taken. And this not once, but again and again has the admonition sounded in our ears. Our pews are filled with the sombre hues of mourning. Our graveyard is filling fast—not with the old, no, but with the young—the strong—our bravest and our best. Oh, young men, which of you next shall be borne to the narrow home appointed for all the living?

May God sanctify to us our loss, and fit us for our change when it comes.